

## Neil Wilfred Archbold

14 August 1950 - 28 November 2005

It is with deep sadness that news of the death of Professor Neil Archbold has been received by members of the FNCV. It was only in May 2005 that Neil delivered the opening address at the Club's 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Symposium. He was a long-standing and committed supporter of the Club and encouraged others, including his students, to participate in Club activities. Professor Archbold was a palaeontologist of international standing. As well as being a leading fossil brachiopod specialist, taxonomist and biostratigrapher he was also a keen amateur field naturalist and had an interest in the history of geology and palaeontology.

It was not generally well known that as a child Neil suffered from a chronic life-threatening illness, and between the ages of eight and twelve underwent a long series of operations by distinguished wartime surgeon Sir Albert Coates, which saved his life. Over the years Neil periodically underwent further surgery but he always remained cheerful, alert, uncomplaining and optimistic. Consequently, despite periodic bouts of poor health in recent years, his death still came as a severe shock. Throughout his working life Neil had a remarkable ability to focus on his scientific research and pursue his academic interests no matter what his prevailing medical circumstances.

Neil's interests were many and diverse. He was a great collector. At an early age he began collecting all sorts of natural objects as well as stamps, coins and books. From about the age of eight he displayed a deep interest in natural history, especially the Lepidoptera. As well as butterflies and moths he also turned his attention to spiders, native birds, native animals and native plants generally, rocks, minerals, fossils, astronomy and later, to conservation issues, in particular the preservation of native fauna and flora and also geological heritage.

He followed his brother Jim in his devotion to natural history and to butterflies in particular. The family home was in Barkly



Neil with butterfly net at his family home in Mitcham c. late 1950s.

Terrace, Mitcham, and the local butterfly species collected included the Emperor Gum Moth (*Opodiphthera eucalypti*), Wanderer or Monarch Butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*), Orchard Swallowtail (*Papilio aegeus*), Painted Lady (*Vanessa kershawi*) and the little brown Skippers (Hesperiidae). They collected the eggs and the caterpillars and bred them. Eventually the progeny were released. For several years they carried out banding of the Wanderer Butterfly. They noted population changes in years of abundance or scarcity. Neil and Jim took a strong interest in the accidental introduction of the European wasp, which had a negative impact on their beloved caterpillars, and they vigorously sought out wasp nests and destroyed them.



Neil Archbold at Deakin University c. mid 1990s.

Later Neil and his wife Linda cultivated a flourishing, mainly native, garden at their home in Doncaster East, featuring many drought-tolerant plants and a number of uncommon species such as araucarias and ginkgo. Neil grew specific plants to attract butterflies, such as stinging nettles (*Urtica*) to attract Painted Ladies, Swan plant (*Asclepias*) to attract Wanderers and *Buddleia* (for many species).

After completing his secondary school education at Camberwell Grammar School in Canterbury in 1969, Neil completed a BA (1973), MSc (1976) and PhD (1983) all at the University of Melbourne. His PhD was on Permian brachiopods in which he eventually became a recognised world authority. His supervisor was George Thomas, who had a special interest in Western Australian brachiopod faunas on which Neil did his original work and remained interested in throughout his career. This work expanded to include Late Palaeozoic biogeography and local and international stratigraphic correlations. For example, Neil published on stratigraphical relationships within Australia, such as between the Eastern and Western

Australian provinces, as well as between the Australian faunas and those of other Gondwanan faunas, such as those in India, Timor, Irian Jaya and Thailand, and those even further afield, for example in Russia and Serbia.

Neil published more than 160 scientific papers. Of these he was sole author of 76 papers but he was also a great collaborator, publishing some 85 papers with 40 or so co-researchers from more than 20 institutions around the globe. The topics ranged from the taxonomy of brachiopods to palaeogeography, palaeobiogeography, palaeoclimatology, palaeoecology, ocean circulation patterns, global stratigraphy and the history of geology and palaeontology.

His taxonomic output was impressive, describing more than 150 new species, nearly 40 new genera or subgenera, five new subfamilies and one new family of brachiopods as well as a new species of bivalve and a new genus and species of trilobite.

The Permian glacially-derived sediments of the Bacchus Marsh district held a special interest for Neil and he frequently conducted field trips with his students to this area. He was particularly interested in elucidating the palaeontological and geological details of what appeared to be a brief marine incursion in the area. He was pleased when he and his colleagues discovered that the marine incursion was far more extensive than had been previously believed despite 150 years of prior intermittent investigation.

Neil's academic career began in 1973 at the University of Melbourne where he was employed firstly as a part-time tutor (1973-1980) and then full-time tutor (1980-1982) in the Geology Department. He also tutored for many years (1973-1989) for the Council of Adult Education where he inspired many students to take up an interest in geology and palaeontology. A number of his mature-age students became active members of the Geology Group of the FNCV. He taught at a number of institutions until, in 1989, he became a full-time lecturer at Rusden campus of Victoria College (which was incorporated into Deakin University in 1992). He then underwent a rapid series of promotions, becoming Professor (personal chair) in

1996. From 1985 onwards he received 15 research grants from the Australian Research Council. He raised the status of the geology section at Deakin University from relative obscurity to one of national and international significance.

He was an encouraging and much appreciated tutor, lecturer and postgraduate supervisor. His own research received wide recognition and he established productive linkages with scientists both at home and abroad. He had a strong commitment to international cooperative research and the development of science in countries such as Russia, China, India, Argentina and Timor. He was a member of numerous scientific and academic societies and served on many local and international committees.

Perhaps his most treasured institutional contribution was to the Royal Society of Victoria where he served as honorary librarian for many years. He joined the RSV in 1975 and became a member of Council (1992-2005), Vice-President (1999-2000) and President (2001-2004). His work as custodian of the Society's valuable library and in finding it a perma-

nent home was decisive to its preservation. He helped broaden the Society's appeal to the general public and defended and promoted the Society's traditional scientific emphasis. His legacy is a vital, active Society with a growing membership, in comparison with some similar institutions that at present are struggling for relevance and viability.

Universally regarded as a gentleman, Neil was admired and loved by his colleagues. He was an inspirational scientist, intellectual and teacher. His wisdom, insight, humour, gentleness and fortitude will be deeply missed. His untimely passing at the peak of his career is a grievous loss to science and natural history.

#### Acknowledgements

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**Doug McCann**

School of Life and Environmental Sciences  
Deakin University, Melbourne Campus  
221 Burwood Highway, Burwood Victoria 3125

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## Survival of a blind Bobuck *Trichosurus cunninghami*, Phalangeridae

The Bobuck or Mountain Brushtail Possum *Trichosurus cunninghami* is a large (2.6-4.2 kg), semi-arboreal, nocturnal marsupial which dens in tree hollows or, less often, hollow logs, disused Common Wombat *Vombatus ursinus* burrows or thickets on the ground. Its predominant food is foliage of Silver Wattle *Acacia dealbata*, and it spends most of its active time on the ground, moving between wattle trees and feeding on additional items including fungi and various understorey and ground-layer plants. General accounts of the Bobuck are provided by Menkhurst (1995, as *T. caninus*) and Kerle (2001, as *T. caninus*); Bobucks in the Strathbogie Ranges, in Victoria, have been intensively studied by Martin (2005; see also Martin *et al.* 2004).

On 16 October 2005, two of the authors (AAM, SMM) encountered an adult female Bobuck on the ground at Marraweeny (36° 44'S, 145° 45'E) in the Strathbogie Ranges, at 1705 hours on a warm, sunny day. She was in a grassy, creek-side area with fern-thickets and scattered Silver Wattles, moving towards the adjacent Peppermint (*Eucalyptus radiata* and *E. dives*) forest. The forest had been logged and included few hollow-bearing trees, but there were numerous used and disused Common Wombat burrows in the area. She was carrying a large back-young; both animals appeared to be well-fed and in excellent condition. In this area young are born in autumn or early winter and leave the pouch to travel on the back at